

## **Understanding Community Schools as Collaboratives for System Building to Address Barriers and Promote Well-Being**

(March, 2011)

### **Abstract**

This brief reviews different agenda for establishing school-community connections in general and community schools specifically. A Comprehensive Community School is discussed as an entity that emerges from system building by school-family-community collaboratives. Establishing effective collaboratives requires policy that supports shared governance, a well-designed operational infrastructure, and the weaving together of overlapping institutional missions and resources. Policy implications for facilitating the types of systemic changes involved are underscored.

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## Understanding Community Schools as Collaboratives for System Building to Address Barriers and Promote Well-Being

*We don't accomplish anything in this world alone ... and whatever happens is the result of the whole tapestry of one's life and all the weavings of individual threads from one to another that creates something.*

Sandra Day O'Connor

While every school is in a neighborhood, only a few designate themselves as *Community Schools*. And, those using the term vary considerably in what they do and don't do. For some the term is adopted mainly to indicate a school's commitment to finding better ways to involve families and link with other community stakeholders. Others adopt it to reflect the implementation on campus of family centers, volunteer and mentor programs, school-based health centers, a variety of co-located health and human services, and efforts to extend the school day for learning and recreation. A few are involved in comprehensive collaborations focused on weaving together a wide range of school and community resources (including the human and social capital in a neighborhood) to enhance results for children, families, schools, and neighborhoods.

### Advocacy for School-Community Connections in General & Community Schools Specifically

Advocacy for various forms of school-community connections are embedded into policies and practices related to divergent and often conflicting school and community interests and initiatives (Center for Mental Health in Schools, 2008). For example, on the school side, a focus on both parent and community involvement at schools during and after the school day are features of the *No Child Left Behind Act* and the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act*. An additional push toward school and community collaboration is generated by the emphasis in these acts on supplemental and special services, extended learning, and school-to-career opportunities.

For families, organized efforts to connect with schools reflect the agenda of specific subgroups (e.g., PTA, family organizations representing students with learning, behavior, or emotional problems).

### *Interest in connecting school and community stems from different agenda*

On the community side, a major thrust has come from federal, state, and local efforts to reform community agencies and connect agencies and schools. For example, a widespread agenda for some community agencies is to establish linkages with schools for purposes of increasing access to clients and enhancing coordination and integration of services. Unfortunately, such a narrow focus often ends up limiting the nature and scope of collaboration at Community Schools. In particular, this agenda downplays systemic integration with the various education support programs and services that schools

*One of the most important, cross-cutting social policy perspectives to emerge in recent years is an awareness that no single institution can create all the conditions that young people need to flourish . . .*  
Melaville & Blank (1998)

own and operate, and it fails to harness the full range of resources in homes and neighborhoods. And, perhaps even worse, the overemphasis on co-locating community services on campus has conveyed the mistaken impression that community services can effectively meet the needs of schools in addressing barriers to learning and teaching. This has led some policy makers to view the linking of community services to schools as a way to free up the dollars underwriting school-owned services. The reality is that even when one adds together community and school assets, available resources in impoverished locales are woefully underfinanced. In situation after situation, it has become evident that as soon as the first few schools in a district co-locate community agency services on their campuses, local agencies find their resources stretched to the limit.

A second thrust from the community side has come from the business community, and a third has come from social activists, community-based organizations, and institutions of higher education (e.g., philanthropic foundations, the Children's Defense Fund, Children's Aid Society, Communities in Schools, groups concerned with organizing communities, groups focused on youth development, groups representing "minorities"). This last sector of stakeholders has generated a community schools' movement (e.g., Blank, Melaville, & Shah, 2004; Coalition for Community Schools, [www.communityschools.org](http://www.communityschools.org); Dryfoos & Maguire, 2002). This movement was largely responsible for enactment of 2007 federal legislation to fund a *Full-Service Community Schools Program* and house it in the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Innovation and Improvement. And the Coalition currently is working with Senator Sanders to amend the Elementary and Secondary Education Act to support community schools.

Cross cutting the various sectors is advocacy for bringing schools-communities-families together to focus on a specific problem, such as raising achievement, addressing youth violence, fighting substance abuse, enhancing physical and mental health, and so forth. For example:

- This has been a major concern of federal support for *Systems of Care* (U.S. Dept. of HHS, <http://www.samhsa.gov/Grants/2010/TI-10-007.aspx>)
- It is stated as a fundamental aspect of the draft description for the 2011 Safe Schools / Healthy Students Program (see <http://www2.ed.gov/legislation/FedRegister/proprule/2011-1/021811b.pdf>)
- It also is a central focus in recommendations for the newly established *Office of Adolescent Health* in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (National Alliance to Advance Adolescent Health, 2011).

- And just reintroduced in Congress is the *Mental Health in Schools Act of 2011* (H.R. 751), which includes an emphasis on facilitating “community partnerships among families, students, law enforcement agencies, education systems, mental health and substance use disorder service systems, family-based mental health service systems, welfare agencies, health care service systems, and other community-based systems.”

### Community Schools: An Evolving Concept, an Emerging Quality

In an 2011 document entitled, *Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) Reauthorization Framework*, the Coalition for Community Schools states:

“A community school is both a place and a set of partnerships between the school and other community resources. They are centers of the community, open to everyone - all day, every day, evenings and weekends, coordinating the assets of schools and communities to more efficiently and effectively meet students' needs. Using public schools as a hub, community schools bring together a wide variety of partners to offer a comprehensive range of services and opportunities to children, youth, families and communities. Its integrated focus on academics, health and social services, youth and community development, early learning and care, expanded learning, along with family and community engagement leads to improved student learning, stronger families and healthier communities. Local citizens and local leaders decide what happens in their schools and schools return to their historic role as centers of community where everyone belongs, everyone works together, and our young people succeed.”

In an earlier statement of the Coalition’s vision for Community Schools, it was also emphasized that Community engagement helps promote a school climate that is safe, supportive and respectful and that connects students to a broader learning community (Blank, Berg, & Melaville, 2006).

Many schools endorse the vision implied above, and some of these call themselves Community Schools.\* Supporters of Community Schools often are drawn to the term because of their concern with improving school climate, changing school culture, focusing on the whole child, addressing diversity needs, and taking a “broader and bolder approach” in order to transform public education. Diverse concepts commonly raised in

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\*It is not clear how many schools have adopted the designation, never mind how many have achieved the Coalition’s vision. It is clear that the concept of Community Schools should not be confused with the geographic designation, *Community School Districts*, used by a variety of districts across the country. In such districts, there may or may not be schools that are pursuing a Community School vision.

discussions of Community Schools include establishing a psychological sense of community; promoting well-being, resilience, and protective factors; increasing student and family empowerment and collaborative governance; pursuing culturally responsive pedagogy and advocacy-oriented assessment; and ensuring social justice and equity of opportunity.

*A fully developed  
Community School  
only emerges after  
a collaborative  
effectively carries out  
functions essential  
to operationalizing  
the vision*

Whether or not a school adopts the term *community school*, the reality is that schools, families, and communities all affect each other (for good or ill). From an intervention perspective, it is evident that dealing with multiple, interrelated concerns, such as poverty, child development, education, violence, crime, safety, housing, and employment requires multiple and interrelated solutions. Interrelated solutions require collaboration. Thus, in pursuing shared goals related to education, development, and socialization of the young and the general well-being of society, it behooves schools, homes, and communities to work together.

Moreover, what seems clear is that developing a school that fits the vision requires school, family, and community stakeholders to collaborate in a relentless manner over a period of years. A fully developed Community School only *emerges* when such a collaborative effectively carries out the functions essential to approximating the stated vision.

With the above considerations in mind and despite the variability in policies and practices found at sites designating themselves as *Community Schools*, we embrace the term for its symbolic value and its contribution to (a) underscoring the fact that schools, families, and communities are interlocking pieces that shape a society's character and viability, (b) encouraging collaboration to address overlapping concerns, and (c) expanding school improvement policy and practice beyond the prevailing limited focus on academic performance to encompass commitment to whole child development.

#### **Lessons Learned About Problems Resulting from Poor Collaboration**

All initiatives have a downside. Efforts to enhance Community Schools and other school-community collaboration are no exception. Four major negative effects have been (a) an increase in fragmented intervention, (b) reification of the trend to react to problems rather than prevent them and thus to focus on a relatively few students rather than meeting the needs of the many, (c) conflict among school and community providers, and (d) a reduction in the total amount of resources for intervention because of the tendency for school policy makers to cut-back on school-owned student support staff in the belief that contracting community resources can meet the need.

To elaborate a bit on the matter of negative effects: It is ironic that, while collaborative initiatives are meant to reduce fragmentation (with the intent of enhancing outcomes), this generally is not the case. Most school and community interventions still function in relative isolation of each other. Indeed, fragmentation tends to be compounded whenever initiatives focus mostly on *linking* and *co-locating* community services to schools (Adelman & Taylor, 1997, 2006a, b, 2010). When community agencies co-locate personnel at schools, such personnel tend to operate independently of existing school programs and services. Little attention is paid to developing effective mechanisms for coordinating complementary activity or integrating parallel efforts. Consequently, a youngster identified as at risk for bullying, dropout, and substance abuse may be involved in three programs operating independently of each other.

Also, the tendency of many community agencies is to focus on discrete and often serious problems and specialized services for a relatively small number of individuals. While the need is evident, this approach colludes with trends that react mainly by providing clinical services rather than developing interventions to prevent problems.

For many reasons, there is rising tension between school district employed support staff and their counterparts in community based organizations. When "outside" professionals are brought in, school specialists often view it as discounting their skills and threatening their jobs. The "outsiders" often feel unappreciated and may be rather naïve about the culture of schools. Conflicts arise over "turf," use of space, confidentiality, and liability. And, increasingly, school staff fear that contracts with community agencies will result in a reduction-in-force of a district's student support professionals.

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interventions***

On a more basic school improvement level, the piecemeal approach to school-community collaboration has contributed to the continuing failure of policymakers at all levels to recognize the need to fundamentally transform the work of school and community professionals who are in positions to facilitate development and learning and address barriers to learning and teaching. The reality is that prevailing approaches to collaboration often marginalize efforts to develop a comprehensive system of interventions (Adelman & Taylor, 2003; 2006a; 2010; Center for Mental Health in Schools, 2011). To address the above concerns, policies and guides for developing comprehensive Community Schools must pay greater attention to countering negative effects arising from the work.

**Moving in New  
Directions:  
Establishing  
Collaboratives for  
System Building**

Besides schools that designate themselves as Community Schools, many others across the country bring together stakeholders for many purposes, including co-location and coordination of services. The range of community entities is not limited to agencies and organization. It encompasses all human and social capital in a neighborhood (e.g., people, businesses, community based organizations, postsecondary institutions, religious and civic groups, programs at parks and libraries, and any other facilities that are useful for recreation, learning, enrichment, and support). As a result, the nature and scope of stakeholder relationships varies considerably. At Community Schools, such relationships frequently are referred to as partnerships; however, too often this is a premature characterization. Some don't even constitute a meaningful collaboration.

*The real difficulty in  
changing the course of  
any enterprise  
lies not in developing  
new ideas but in  
escaping old ones*  
John Maynard Keynes

While it is relatively simple to make informal connections to accomplish specific tasks (e.g., linking and coordinating with a few service agencies or after school program providers), it is much more difficult to establish and institutionalize a major long-term collaborative partnership for system building. Advocates for school, community, and family connections have cautioned that some so-called collaborations amount to little more than groups sitting around engaging in "collabo-babble."

In negotiating agreements to work together, decision makers frequently are asked simply to sign a memorandum of understanding, rather than involving potential collaborators in processes that lead to a comprehensive, informed commitment. Relatedly, collaboratives should not heavily rely on positive personal relationships. Personal connections are vulnerable to the mobility that characterizes many groups. The aim is to establish stable and sustainable *working relationships*.

Effective working relationships require clear role-related responsibilities and an institutionalized infrastructure, including well-designed mechanisms for performing tasks, solving problems, and mediating conflict. There also must be sufficient resources and time so participants can learn and carry out new functions effectively. And, when newcomers join, well-designed procedures must be in place to bring them up to speed.

Clearly, bringing together stakeholders is not the same as establishing an effective collaborative. For many sites calling themselves Community Schools, developing and sustaining an effective collaborative remains an elusive and ongoing challenge.

Our analyses suggest that any vision for developing a *Comprehensive Community School* involves establishing and maintaining a collaborative of stakeholders dedicated to building a comprehensive, multifaceted, cohesive system of interventions that can strengthen youngsters, families, schools, and their communities and significantly reduce problems. Building such a system, of course, requires well-designed policy, accountability, and systemic changes. To be effective in pursuing such changes, the collaborative must be institutionalized through formalized contract-like agreements.

Indeed, the hallmark of a school-community collaborative is a formalized agreement among participants to establish an autonomous structure to accomplish goals that would be difficult to achieve by any of the participants alone. A school-community collaborative may be formed with one school or sometimes a group of schools (or an entire school district in the case of small districts). While community participants may have a primary affiliation elsewhere, they commit to working in the collaborative under specified conditions to pursue a shared vision and common set of goals. In this context, collaboration becomes both a desired process and an outcome for schools and communities.

#### **Shared Governance and Functions**

A collaborative structure requires shared governance (power, authority, decision-making, accountability) and a set of resources woven together for pursuing the shared vision and goals. Thus, agreements must spell out how prevailing governance and operational infrastructure will be transformed to enable weaving together overlapping institutional missions and resources and using the resources in planned and mutually beneficial ways.

At a Comprehensive Community School, governance must be designed to ensure (a) the vision and mission are effectively pursued, (b) power is equalized so that decision-making appropriately reflects all stakeholder groups and so that all are equally accountable, and (c) all participants share in the workload – pursuing clear roles and functions. Achieving these objectives is a process of both development and learning.

Shared governance requires empowerment of all stakeholder groups and use of processes that equalize power and ensure equity and fairness in decision making. Empowerment is a multifaceted concept. In discussing power, theoreticians distinguish “power over” from “power to” and “power from.” *Power over* involves explicit or implicit dominance over others and events; *power to* is seen as increased opportunities to act; *power from* implies ability to resist the power of others (see Hollander & Offermann, 1990; Riger, 1993).



Equalizing power among stakeholders involves well-designed contractual agreements, considerable capacity building, and safeguards to minimize abuse of all three forms of power.

Major examples of shared functions are:

*Authentic community engagement necessarily entails delegating and sharing responsibility, especially getting more stakeholders to commit and contribute voluntarily for both civic and self-interested reasons.*  
Ohio Public-Private Collaborative Commission (2008)

- facilitating communication, cooperation, coordination, integration
- operationalizing the vision of stakeholders into desired functions and tasks
- enhancing support for and developing a policy commitment to ensure necessary resources are dispensed for accomplishing desired functions
- advocacy, analysis, priority setting, governance, planning, implementation, and evaluation related to desired functions
- aggregating data from schools and neighborhood to analyze system needs
- mapping, analyzing, managing, redeploying, and weaving available resources together to enable Clearly, the myriad political and bureaucratic difficulties involved in making major institutional changes, especially with sparse financial resources, leads to the caution that such changes are not easily accomplished without a high degree of commitment and relentlessness of effort. Also, it accomplishment of desired functions
- establishing leadership and institutional and operational mechanisms (e.g., infrastructure) for guiding and managing accomplishment of desired functions
- defining and incorporating new roles and functions into job descriptions
- building capacity for planning, implementing and evaluating desired functions, including ongoing stakeholder development for continuous learning and renewal and for bringing new arrivals up to speed
- defining standards, expanding accountability indicators, and ensuring appropriate outcome evaluation
- social marketing

In ensuring development of a comprehensive system of interventions, the above functions encompass many specific tasks, such as exploring ways to weave resources together (see Exhibit 1). Other major tasks include mapping and analyzing resources; making recommendations about priorities for use of resources; raising funds and pursuing grants; and advocating for appropriate resource decision making. As highlighted in the next section, carrying out such complex functions and tasks requires an effective operational infrastructure.

## Exhibit 1

### About Weaving Resources\*

An essential school-family-community collaborative function is to effectively weave the resources (i.e., human, social, and economic capital) of participating stakeholders together. This is particularly essential in impoverished neighborhoods. While some Community Schools have established a K-12 configuration, most are elementary, middle, or high schools. For those focused on specific grade levels, there are many reasons to expand collaborative efforts to encompass K-12 and eventually pre-K. One reason is financial. Existing resources can be considerably enhanced through the many efficiencies and economies of scale resulting from such collaboration. Furthermore, because stakeholders in the same geographic or catchment area have a number of shared concerns, some programs and personnel already are or can be shared by several neighboring schools, thereby minimizing redundancy, reducing costs, and enhancing equity.

As poor as they may be, schools in economically distressed locales represent major resources. They usually are the largest pieces of public real estate; they house an array of physical facilities, special personnel, computers and other special resources, etc.; and they often are the single largest employer in the area. They have core operational finances from the general funds budget, compensatory and special education funding, and sometimes extra-mural funding. And students are not just recipients of services; they are a significant human and social capital resource.

On the community side, major resources include families, community-based and linked organizations, such as public and private health and human service agencies, civic groups, businesses, faith-based organizations, institutions of postsecondary learning, and so forth. Community collaborators can bring to the table some of their general funds and extra-mural funding, personnel, facilities, materials, and human and social capital/expertise.

As specific functions and initiatives are undertaken that reflect overlapping arenas of concern for school and community stakeholders, a portion of separate funding streams can be braided together. And, despite economic setbacks, there remain opportunities to supplement the budget with extra-mural grants that are designed to promote school-family-community collaboration (e.g., the federal Safe Schools/Healthy Students projects and 21st Century Community Learning Centers projects). With respect to grants in general, however, it is important to avoid “mission drift” (e.g., seeking funded projects that will distract participants from vigorously pursuing the vision of a Comprehensive Community School).

\*For more on resource concerns, see Appendix D in *Community Schools: Working Toward Institutional Transformation* at <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/csinstitutionaltrans.pdf> ; *Funding Stream Integration to Promote Development and Sustainability of a Comprehensive System of Learning Supports* at <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/fundingstream.pdf> ; *Financing Community Schools: Leveraging Resources to Support Student Success* at [http://www.communityschools.org/assets/1/AssetManager/Final\\_Finance\\_ExecSum.pdf](http://www.communityschools.org/assets/1/AssetManager/Final_Finance_ExecSum.pdf)

### **Establishing a Collaborative Infrastructure**

Many efforts to collaborate have floundered because too little attention was paid to establishing an effective operational infrastructure for working together. An effective collaborative is the product of a well-conceived infrastructure of mechanisms that are appropriately sanctioned and endorsed by governing bodies (Center for Mental Health in Schools, 2009). Key elements of such an operational infrastructure are mechanisms for oversight and leadership, ongoing capacity building and support, and accomplishing specific functions. The process of initially establishing a school-community-family collaborative infrastructure may begin at any level; however, it is good to think first about what is needed locally and then what is necessary to support the local work.

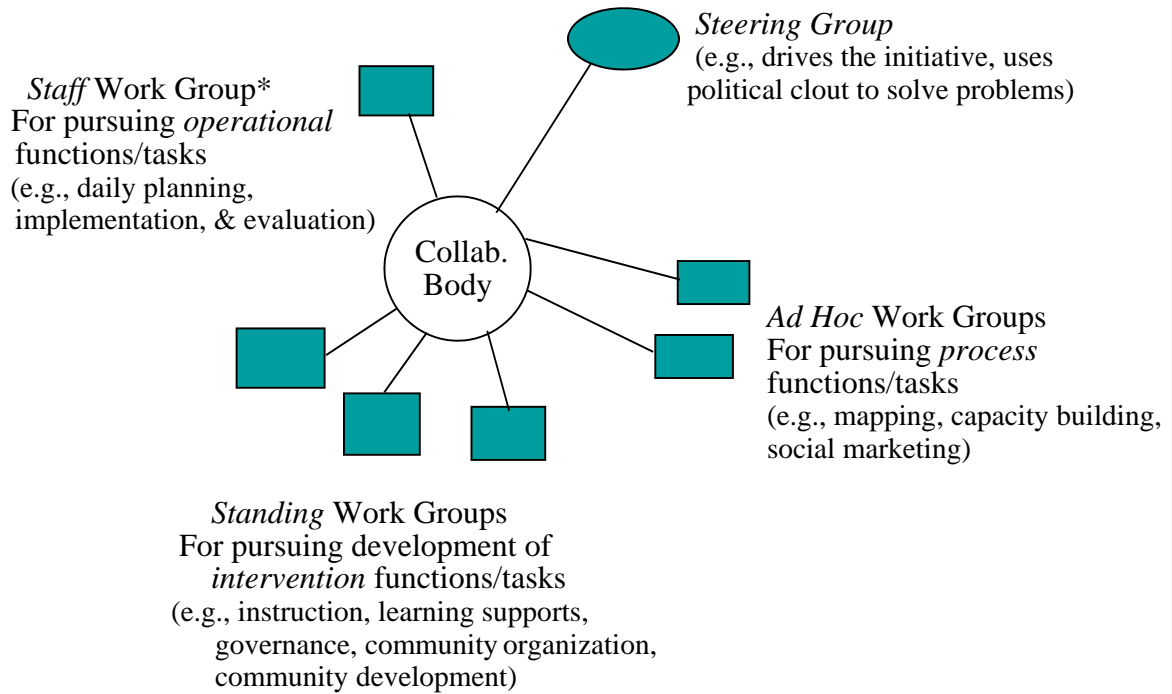
All collaboratives need a core team to steer, support, and nurture the process. The team must consist of competent individuals who are highly motivated – not just initially but over time. The complexity of collaboration requires providing continuous, personalized guidance and support to enhance knowledge and skills and counter anxiety, frustration, and other stressors. This entails close monitoring and *immediate* follow-up to address problems.

Other key facets of the infrastructure are designated operational leaders and staff, and ad hoc and standing work groups (e.g., resource-oriented and intervention development teams). Exhibit 2 graphically illustrates the basic elements of a comprehensive collaborative operational infrastructure.

Locally, the focus is on connecting families and community resources usually with one school. Then, collaborative connections may encompass a cluster of schools. For example, many natural connections exist in catchment areas serving a high school and its feeder schools. The same family often has children attending all levels of schooling at the same time. Some school districts and agencies already pull together several geographically-related clusters to combine and integrate personnel and programs. In a small community, a cluster often is the school district. Several collaboratives may coalesce to increase efficiency and effectiveness and achieve economies of scale. Finally, “systemwide” (e.g., district, city, county) mechanisms can be designed to provide support for what each locality is trying to develop.

Exhibit 2

### Basic Elements of a Comprehensive Collaborative Operational Infrastructure



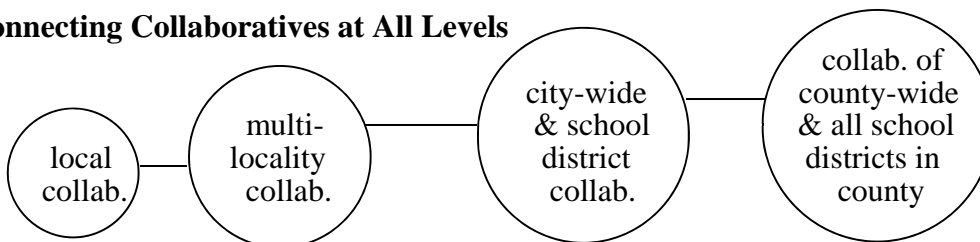
*\*Staffing*

- >Executive Director
- >Organization Facilitator (change agent)

*Who should be at the table?*

- >families
- >schools
- >communities

### Connecting Collaboratives at All Levels



*Any effort to connect school, home, and community resources must embrace a wide spectrum of stakeholders*

Because adjoining localities have common concerns, they may have interventions that can use the same resources. Through coordination and sharing, redundancy can be minimized and resources can be deployed equitably and pooled to reduce costs. Toward these ends, a multilocality collaborative can help (1) coordinate and integrate programs serving multiple schools and neighborhoods; (2) identify and meet common needs for stakeholder development; and (3) create linkages and enhance collaboration among schools and agencies. Such a group can provide a broader-focused mechanism for leadership, communication, maintenance, quality improvement, and ongoing development of a comprehensive continuum of programs and services. Multilocality collaboratives are especially attractive to community agencies that often don't have the time or personnel to link with individual schools.

It is important to ensure that all who live in an area are represented – including, but not limited to, representatives of organized family advocacy groups. The aim is to mobilize all the human and social capital represented by family members and other home caretakers of the young.

The focus on schools encompasses all institutionalized entities responsible for formal education (e.g., pre-K, elementary, secondary, higher education). The aim is to weave in a critical mass of the resources represented in these institutions.

The remaining community resources (public and private money, facilities, human and social capital) that can be brought to the table encompass entities such as service agencies, businesses, unions, community and economic development organizations, recreation, cultural, and youth development groups, libraries, juvenile justice, law enforcement, faith-based institutions, service clubs, media, postsecondary and vocational education institutions, among others. The political realities of local control have further expanded collaboratives to include policymakers, representatives of families, nonprofessionals, volunteers, and anyone else willing to contribute their talents and resources. And, as the collaborative develops, outreach to disenfranchised groups is important.

Properly constituted with school, home, and community representatives, a school-community collaborative develops an infrastructure of leadership, work groups, and staffing to pursue functions. To be effective, there must be (1) adequate resources (time, space, materials, equipment) to support the infrastructure; (2) capacity building (e.g., training and support) to ensure participants have the competence to perform their roles and functions; (3) authority to act; and (4) ways to

*It's relatively easy  
to convene a  
"collaborative" . . .  
it's developing and  
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an effective  
infrastructure  
that's hard to do.*

address personnel turnover quickly so new staff are brought up to speed. Because work groups usually are the mechanism of choice, particular attention must be paid to increasing levels of competence and enhancing motivation of all stakeholders for working together. (Stakeholder development spans four stages: orientation, foundation-building, capacity-building, and continuing education.)

Not only must collaboratives be continuously nurtured, facilitated, and supported, special attention must be given to overcoming institutional and personal barriers. A fundamental institutional barrier to effective school-community collaboration is the degree to which efforts to establish such connections are *marginalized* in policy and practice. The extent to which this is the case is seen when existing policy, accountability, leadership, budget, space, time schedules, and capacity-building agendas do not support efforts to use collaborative arrangements effectively and efficiently to accomplish desired results. This may simply be a matter of benign neglect. More often, it stems from a lack of understanding, commitment, and/or capability related to establishing and maintaining a potent infrastructure for working together and sharing resources. Occasionally, lack of support takes the ugly form of forces at work trying to actively undermine collaboration. Examples of institutional barriers include:

- Policies that mandate collaboration but do not enable the process (e.g., a failure to reconcile differences among participants with respect to the outcomes for which they are accountable; inadequate provision for braiding funds across agencies and categorical programs)
- Policies for collaboration that do not provide adequate resources and time for leadership and stakeholder training and for overcoming barriers to collaboration
- Leadership that does not establish an effective infrastructure, especially mechanisms for steering and accomplishing work/tasks on a regular, ongoing basis
- Differences in the conditions and incentives associated with participation such as the fact that meetings usually are set during the work day which means community agency and school personnel are paid participants, while family members are expected to volunteer their time.

At the personal level, barriers mostly stem from practical deterrents, negative attitudes, and deficiencies of knowledge and skill. These vary for different stakeholders but often include problems related to work schedules, transportation, child care, communication skills, differences in organizational culture, accommodations for language and cultural differences, and so forth.

## Conclusion

Community Schools and other efforts to develop school-family-community collaborations show significant promise for addressing barriers and promoting well-being (Blank, Jacobson, & Pearson, 2009). At the same time, it is well to remember there is great variability among what are called Community Schools. In particular, it is essential to differentiate those that are mainly interested in enhancing connections with community agencies from those committed to a vision for developing a comprehensive school-family-community collaborative. It is the latter that have the greatest potential for addressing the whole child and for doing so in ways that strengthen families, schools, and neighborhoods. In contrast, focusing primarily on linking community services to schools colludes with tendencies to downplay the role of existing school and other community and family resources. It also contributes to perpetuation of approaches that overemphasize individually prescribed services, further fragment intervention, and underutilize the human and social capital indigenous to every neighborhood. All this is incompatible with developing the type of comprehensive approaches needed to make values such as *We want all children to succeed* and *No Child Left Behind* more than rhetorical statements.

Comprehensive Community Schools share with a number of other initiatives the goal of addressing what's missing in prevailing approaches to school improvement. Of particular concern to all these initiatives are changes in school improvement policy and practice that would enable development of a full continuum of interventions to ensure all students have an equal opportunity to succeed at school and in life. In essence, the aim is to transform public education.

The success of a school-family-community collaborative in general and Comprehensive Community Schools in particular is first and foremost in the hands of policy makers. The policy aim should be development of a comprehensive, multifaceted, and cohesive system of interventions. This will require ending the marginalization and the ad hoc and piecemeal policy making that have characterized efforts to build such a system.

Developing the desired continuum of interventions requires braiding together many public and private resources. In schools, this means enhancing cost-effectiveness by rethinking intervention and restructuring to combine parallel efforts supported by general funds, compensatory and special education entitlement, safe and drug free school grants, and specially funded projects. In communities, the need is for better ways of mobilizing the human and social capital of families and the expertise and resources of agencies and other stakeholders and connecting these resources to each other and to "families of schools" (e.g., high schools and their feeder schools).

To these ends, a high priority policy commitment is required to (a) develop and sustain collaboration, (b) support the strategic convergence of school and community resources in order to develop comprehensive, multifaceted, and cohesive approaches, and (c) generate renewal. Such a policy commitment includes revisiting current policies to reduce redundancy and redeploy allocated

school and community resources that currently are being used in inefficient and ineffective ways.

In terms of facilitating the major systemic changes involved in all this, policy must support

- moving existing *governance* toward shared decision making and appropriate degrees of local control and private sector involvement – a key facet of this is guaranteeing roles and providing incentives, supports, and training for effective involvement of line staff, families, students, and other community members
- creating *change teams and change agents* to carry out the daily activities of systemic change related to building essential support and redesigning processes to initiate, establish, and maintain changes over time
- delineating high level *leadership assignments* and underwriting essential *leadership/ management training* related to vision for change, how to effect such changes, how to institutionalize the changes, and generate ongoing renewal
- establishing institutionalized *mechanisms to manage and enhance resources* for school-family-community collaboration (mechanisms for analyzing, planning, coordinating, integrating, monitoring, evaluating, and strengthening ongoing efforts)
- providing adequate funds for *capacity building* related to both accomplishing desired system changes and enhancing intervention quality over time – a key facet of this is a major investment in staff and other stakeholder recruitment and development using well-designed, and technologically sophisticated strategies for dealing with the problems of frequent turnover and diffusing information updates; another facet is an investment in technical assistance at all levels and for all aspects and stages of the work
- using a sophisticated approach to *accountability* that initially emphasizes data that can help develop effective approaches for collaboration in providing interventions and a results-oriented focus on short-term benchmarks and that evolves into evaluation of long-range indicators of impact. (Here, technologically sophisticated and integrated management information systems need to be supported.)

Enhancing current policy in the ways indicated above would allow development of the continuum of interventions needed to make a significant impact. There are, of course, a myriad of political and bureaucratic difficulties involved in making major institutional changes, especially with sparse financial resources. That is why a high degree of commitment and relentlessness of effort is called for in developing effective school-family- community collaboratives for system building.

Most people understand the value of strengthening youngsters, families, schools, and neighborhoods. Now is the time to move forward together to make it happen equitably.



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